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Nurturing the Faith

For Growth in Faith and Mission

Cover meditation ◆◆

Gardens are natural settings for parables about faith. And I remember especially how one garden taught me about *nurturing faith.*

We had just moved and were busier than we ever thought possible. Should we plant a garden this year? "Sure," we decided. "God does all the work anyway."

So we planted the garden, and then, for one reason or another, forgot about it. Soon tall, wheat-like grass overpowered the tomato plants and choked out even the zucchini. Embarrassed, my husband got out the weedwhacker and cut everything down. God is indeed the grower, but it seems attentive gardeners are important too.

Perhaps nurturing the faith is like tending a garden. Faith and gardens can be nurtured by:

- Preparing the soil. Before planting, the gardener works up the soil. Good preparation helps nurture faith too. Worship, Bible study, prayer, Christian education, care and love of others . . . all give the Holy Spirit opportunity to inspire growth in faith and mission.

- Nipping trouble in the bud. Putting straw or other mulch around plants helps

keep weeds from taking over a garden. Avoiding temptation, and practicing confession and forgiveness helps keep from taking over a life.

- Using the right tools. Gardeners have their favorite trowel and claw. Believers have favorite hymns, prayers, Bible verses.

- Paying attention. Gardens need checking on regularly. Faith too.

- Trusting. God will provide for growth: in vegetables, in faith.

- Being thankful and sharing. Preciate the gifts the garden provides. Appreciate the gifts of faith. Share the bounty of both.

- Reflecting and experimenting. Gardeners learn from both good and poor yields, remembering things to avoid or try again. And they often try something new, just for fun. Faith, too, is nurtured in experimentation and education. Did the retreat give you a headache or a headache? Have you ever gone on a retreat?

Perhaps nurturing the faith is like tending a garden; God does the growing, but attentive gardeners are important too.

Sue Edison
Managing Editor

ON THE COVER: "Nurturing the Earth," photograph by Michael Lilja, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

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For the benefit of Women of the ELCA participants, articles relating to Women of the ELCA mission areas are marked with these symbols: ***** = action, **C** = community and **G** = growth.

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◆◆ Letters to the editor

rise . . . Sunset

I received my [May] LWT today, big
it, and just had to tell you how
ased I was. Before I knew it I had
d it through—it is so nicely put
ther. Two topics come to mind—
e You Saved?" and "Are You Saved
ay?" The word *saved* has not been
d much in our studies or writings,
I was glad to see it's coming back.
he cover meditation about sun-
in Hawaii was beautiful, but
n the "sunset" will be beautiful for

Alice Morehart
Caledonia, North Dakota

Letter to Letter

I read with some interest the letters
on Ladd and Strolberg (May), in
which they praised [Robert] Schul-
ler's *Be (Happy) Attitudes*. Schuller
and [Norman Vincent] Peale are
part of a "Make Us Feel Good,
Glorious" mentality.

Twenty-five percent of U.S. children
live in poverty. The despair re-
sulted in the growth of crime, ran-
ge, disease and homelessness.
Leaves us precious little cause for com-
munity.

The institutional church must
wake up to the need for an uncom-
fortable social-action theology.

Mary Alice Lintvedt
Canton, South Dakota

Proofreaders, all

"It" is the current vogue word. If I
read the fine article accurately ["Ra-
tion and the Mystery of Salvation,"

April], that word was left out on page
30, first sentence, in the beginning
of new paragraph. I enjoy proofread-
ing!

Alice Thoresen
Auburn, Washington

*You are absolutely right! Keep up the
good work, and we'll try to keep the
"nots" in sentences where they belong.*
—ED.

I've been out of the workplace for seven years, so may have missed the change; but the spelling of "extrovert" about 20 times as "extravert" seemed so odd ["Many Types—One Spirit," June].

I'm not trying to be a smart-alec, but when did this change? At first I thought it was a typo but not after so many times. Are you missing a proofreader, or am I an old fogey (or fogey)?

Marjorie Cromwell
Spokane, Washington

*The dictionary actually lists both op-
tions, but in Myers-Briggs copyright-
ed materials the authors spell it with
an "a," so we followed their lead.
You're not an old fogey, just a woman
with a sharp eye.—ED.*

I wonder

I read with much interest the article
by the woman who is infected with
the HIV virus [March] and then her
follow-up story in April.

It touched my heart that her
Christian brothers and sisters ac-
cepted her wholeheartedly; however,

I wonder if the acceptance would have been so unconditional if the mode of transmission was sexual rather than by a blood transfusion. I'd like to think so, but would it?

*Alice Pence
Stone Mountain, Georgia*

Different things, different people

My [May] LWT arrived yesterday and it was just about the best ever.

You get so many critical letters, and some issues I have to plough through myself. But I realize different things appeal to different people.

This issue really dealt with spiritual things, and we all need to be reminded again and again of what our church really teaches. I was so pleased seminary professors were among the authors. Perhaps we should hear from them more often.

*Ethel Hollander
Waupun, Wisconsin*

Corrections

- LWT regrets that Boua Sy Ly's name was misspelled in July/August's "About Young Women."
- In "Worship That Works" (December 1991) a description of the worship setting at Community of Christ Lutheran Church, Whitehouse, Ohio, was not clearly attributed to that church's pastor, the Rev. Ray Gottschling. LWT regrets any confusion caused by the article.—ED.

LWT merits three awards

Lutheran Woman Today earned three awards this spring from professional peers in the Association of Church Press. The "Jesus Wept" series (July/August, September, October 1991) won an award of merit for reader response. The judge commented, "This is a deeply moving compilation of readers' experiences of grief. It is beautifully written and organized, letting the stories build impact. The variety of journeys through grief provides healing and a sense of hope."

LWT also received an award of merit for graphics in a small-format magazine for the July/August 1991 issue, "Believers as Theologians." The cover of the "Men" issue (July 1991) won honorable mention.

◆◆ HONOR ROLL ◆◆

- Bang; Portland, North Dakota
- Bethel; Battle View, North Dakota
- Christ; Jefferson, Iowa
- St. Peter's; Marble Falls, Texas
- Salem; Cummings, North Dakota
- Siloah; Graceville, Minnesota
- Union Creek; Akron, Iowa
- Zion; McGregor, North Dakota

In Honor Roll congregations every woman in the church subscribes to LWT. If you are an honor roll congregation, write: Anita Oachs, 1209, Minneapolis, MN 55440.

Faith and Doubt

Paul Bauermeister

Many people wonder, do I have enough faith? What happens if I cannot believe a certain miracle or a part of the Creed? What can I do about my doubts? These questions can bring with them a heavy load of uncertainty and struggle.

The question, Do I have enough faith? arises because of the difficulty we all have hanging on to the sheer size of God's grace. When we try to measure our own faith, we usually end up with either an inflated and vain picture of our faith, or with a stinging self-accusation for the lack of it—usually the latter. Why not measure something better than *our* faith? Why not measure God's grace?

Imagine a drawing the size and color of the midnight sky in the middle of western Kansas. It is deep blue and sprinkled with stars from flat horizon to flat horizon. On this wonderful sketch pad, let's draw a diagram of you and God. In the center of the drawing, straight above, is a great flame, a huge surging yellow, red, orange and purple mass, 10 miles across. That flame represents God.

Streaming out from God is a band of dazzling pure white light about a mile across. It soars up, curls around, then streaks down all the way to the far horizon, where it forms itself into an arrow that points directly at a small red

heart about the size of a postage stamp. The bright band of pure white light is the grace of God. The little red heart is you. Did you catch the size of God? And

Why not measure
something better
than *our* faith?

Why not measure
God's grace?

the size of grace? And you?

So far we have only looked at God's side of the relationship. Your side is much harder to see, because it is much smaller and dimmer. Coming from your little red heart and going back to God is a tiny line of fireflies, dim and flickering. There are times when our feeble response to God goes out, but that does not change God's side of the picture one iota. The band of pure white light still points directly at the little red heart. And it never goes out, never gets dim. God's grace is complete in Jesus Christ, held in place forever by a cross.

The tiny line of fireflies from you to God contains all your love for God, all your faith, prayers, works of kindness, obedience and all your sacrifice. And that minuscule picture is true of all of us! The biggest response any of us ever makes to God's pure light of grace is a tiny dim line of fireflies.

Now that we have begun to measure God's grace, it hardly seems necessary to measure our faith. For how much faith we have really isn't the point, if God has enough grace. And God does have enough grace! In fact, God's grace is big enough to get that sparkling white arrow of light to every little red heart there is, including yours and mine.

Faith is the way we receive God's grace—that big arrow of pure white light that comes from God. The opposite of faith is not doubt. The opposite of faith occurs if I turn away from God and choose to live as though there were no God and no grace.

Doubts about specific details of the Christian story are intellectual dif-

ficulties, more than spiritual trouble. Can you see how someone might have a head full of doubts about kinds of details, and still be turned toward God? Even with doubt, a person's highest delight can remain in the brilliant arrow of God's grace.

Our relationship with God is based on God's grace, not on any kind of balance sheet. When specific doubts bother you, remind yourself that you are trying to love God with all your mind, and that is a hard thing for any of us to do. And remember that the dazzling white arrow pointed right at you.

How can we silence our doubts? Well, praying, or reading the Bible, even fasting or sleeping on a bare board might help. But if these efforts don't help at all, it is because they put us in closer touch with God's grace. We receive God's grace best every time we look at our Lord Jesus, the incarnate Christ, God come among us. Jesus came to bring us God's grace. That is why can you and I handle our doubts? Remember the pure white arrow of God's grace. . . . ■

The Rev. Dr. Paul Bauermeister is a clinical psychologist and pastor serving the Central States Synod as a specialist in pastoral care. He and his wife, the Rev. Jeannette Bauermeister, live on a farm in Missouri.



Fatigue and Sabbath

Bertha T. von Craigh

This article is for the weary—whether unemployed, overworked or under-utilized. The words that follow are about our right to rest, our responsibility to rest, and the one in whom we have our rest.

The Scene

I knew I was in trouble one day when I was at the grocery store and discovered that being there was the high point of my week. It had come to this: getting groceries was my most exciting non-office-related activity! I was going grocery shopping not just to get food but to relax, to relieve stress, to REST. Grocery shopping had become re-creation!

Perhaps you have been at such a point in your life: overworked or under-utilized, in need of re-creation. To be under-utilized is not to be able to use your gifts and abilities in a way that you know you are capable of, or that allows you to be challenged and grow. This can be stressful and fatiguing. This is one reason the unemployed get tired.

The Weariness

Human beings' weariness is complex. For many, the complexity of today's world is made up of stress piled on stress, the ambiguities and insecurities of work; care of family and friends; household maintenance; the weight of crisis after crisis in our communities, the country, and the world. "Life gets in the way of life," is how a friend of mine describes it.

One Sunday—an intended day of rest—I literally ran from a worship service when the preacher hinted in the sermon that somehow we needed to work harder, to give more of ourselves, in order to show our faithfulness. The last thing I needed to

hear was that in order to justify my faith, I needed to work harder. There was no more to give, I had given all I could.

Ever feel like that? When that happens and fatigue gets in the way of God's word, there is serious trouble!

The Question

Does being Christian mean we do not take time for rest and renewal, for recreation? That we must always be doing? Is the cross of the 1990s to be made not of a tree, but of fatigue? Of all weariness, hear our prayer. . . .

The Answer: Remember . . .

Remember, first, that in our Baptism we became God's own. We are, therefore, accountable to God for the stewardship and care of our life. And in truth we are, with God's help, the only ones who can take control of our lives. No one else is going to tell us how we should live. No one else can—tell us when to rest.

Remember, second, to know ourselves. As human beings we are finite and have limitations, no matter how "super-human" some of us are tempted to think we are. We need to accept our limitations—and our need for the gift of rest—the same as God does.

Part of knowing ourselves is knowing what is driving us, distinguishing between real and self-imposed expectations. For instance, ask, "Will we really lose our job if we say no to unreasonable demands or exploitative behavior? Will the family responsibilities give us a hard time if we take some time for ourselves?"

If the answers to these questions are no, then we need to have the courage and release ourselves from the imagined hold such

expectations have on us. If the answers are yes, then we need to come together as a community to challenge the system. We need to ask, What does living together and working together mean? Perhaps outside counseling will help.

Remember, third, that we are not alone. Millions of men, women, and children suffer from a weariness that saps hope and enthusiasm for life. We need to talk with, and support, one another as we change our lifestyles and work expectations. Gathering with others to listen and share what is happening especially if we feel helpless, will lighten our burdens and give us new perceptions.

There are books and articles available that suggest ways to balance our lives between work and re-creation. Many resources have suggestions ranging from time-management to ways of saying no, to encouraging us to change our expectations of life.

Is the cross
of the 1990s
to be made
not of a
tree, but of
fatigue?

remember, our only true security and rest are in Jesus Christ. As we deal with downsizing in factories, businesses, and institutions, and declining job security, we need to remind ourselves that our worth as people and our hope for the future do not rest in human-made security systems, but in the God made known to us in Christ.

The Sabbath Day

In the Scriptures we read of the rhythm of work and rest in the first creation story. In Exodus and Deuteronomy we read of the command to remember a day of rest, a sabbath day that is for the benefit of all from the greatest to the least. In time, however, this wonderful command became abused. But, it was Jesus who reclaimed the Sabbath by convincing his critics in the gospels that the Sabbath was made for human beings, not human beings for the Sabbath. Jesus is Lord, even over our rest times, for these are times of healing, of God's mercy for us, the times when God seeks to cure and care for us.

To Keep It Holy

What does it mean to keep a rest day holy? It is being fed, nurtured and renewed in the presence of Jesus the Christ. This includes the opportunity to encounter the Word of God for our souls.

For many of us a day of rest, the opportunity for worship and encountering the word of God, falls on Sunday. But we cannot rest on the same day. Some people must work at their jobs on Sundays. Knowing the rhythm of our work and rest needs to help us determine our sabbath day. If we are to keep a Sabbath day holy, we will need to have opportunities for worship, including the Eucharist, in addition to Sunday mornings. We make each day holy as we live lives according to our baptismal promises. As God's people we bring a holiness to each hour and day wherever, whenever God's Word is taught, preached, heard, read, or reflected upon.

In short, every day can become a holy day. When we take seriously the Word of God, it can awaken new wonder, new joys, new understandings, new strength for our tasks. The Word of God can refresh and renew us even in the midst of our weariness. ■

Our only
true security
and rest
are in Jesus
Christ.

Rev. Bertha T. von Craigh has served as a deaconess in parish pastor as well as in synodical and church staff positions in the Lutheran church.



Nurturing the Nurturer

Sigrid Sandrock-Cudahy

The arrival of my first child brought myriad feelings, from exhilaration to exhaustion. Yes, there was joy and satisfaction in becoming a mother. But at times there was also sheer panic.

"How do other women do this?" I wondered. When our second child was on the way two-and-a-half years later, I was, in a word, overwhelmed. My husband and I had barely moved to a new pastorate when I found out I was pregnant. After child number two arrived, I knew I was in over my head.

"Were there other women who felt like this?" I wondered. Thankfully there were, and three of us got together one day and decided to form a support group. We called ourselves "Mothers on Minimum Sleep," or MOMS. We sent invitations to other MOMS in the church and invited some nonchurched friends.

We met on a Saturday morning and provided child care (with the help of DADS—Dads Against Diaper Service). We've been meeting for almost a year now. Life is still chaotic, but I know I'm not alone.

As a woman, pastor, wife, and mom, much of my time is spent nurturing others. Many women find themselves in similar roles. We have been brought up to be the nurturers. We often do a great job of caring for others, but how well do we care for ourselves?

Jesus as our example

If there was ever a great care-giver it was Jesus. If there was ever one in need of nurture to be able to carry out his ministry, it was Jesus. How did he do it? One way was to spend time alone away from the crowds. But it is not always practical for us to go on retreat.

More important to our nourishment may be a support group. Jesus had support groups too—in his disciples. True, the disciples were not always supportive and were not without their faults. Still Jesus spent time with the twelve and the inner circle of three—more time than he spent alone, or with the crowds!

the early church patterned itself similarly. There were larger gatherings when an apostle preached and many were converted, at Pentecost. But mostly the early Christians met in homes as support for one another. "And all who believed were together and had all things in common. . . . attending the temple together and eating bread in their homes. . . . (Acts 2:44,46, Revised Standard Version).

We live in a time of mobility. I see people looking for nurture, a feeling of belonging, for a kind of surrogate family. Maybe that's why groups like Alcoholics Anonymous, Gamblers Anonymous, and others are so popular.

Pollster George Gallup says, "I think people want to grow in their experience of community and grow in their faith, but often they don't know how. They don't know the practical steps, how to live out these religious experiences in their lives."* We all need to be authentic, to be affirmed and to be challenged. One place where this can happen is in small support groups within congregations. The women's organization of the church has long known this truth, and circles have been an invaluable place of nurture. The rest of the church is just beginning to catch on.

In our congregation we are experimenting with some new groups: Parents of Adolescents, Marriage Care, Singles Support, Children of Aging Parents, 12-Step Recovery from Addiction, Golden Years (65-plus group), and other small-group Bible study and fellowship.

Now to begin

Ask with your pastor. She or he may know others interested in forming a group, or may know of ones already formed. Gather two or three friends and see if there is interest. Keep in mind that all participants don't have to belong to your church. Small groups can be a great evangelism tool. Set some ground rules and simply begin.

For further information about small-group ministry, write to Serendipity, Box 1012, Littleton, CO 80160. Serendipity offers training in small-group ministry for pastors and lay people and materials for other groups.

* From an interview by Timothy K. Jones, "Tracking America's Soul," *Christianity Today*, Nov. 17, 1989, p. 24.

Rev. Sigrid ("Sigi") Sandrock-Cudahy is co-pastor, with her husband, the Rev. Allen Cudahy, at First Lutheran Church, Port Orchard, Washington. They have two young children, Ryan and Erick.

**Early Christians
met in homes
as support for
one another.**



The Victor's Crown, Hope

Darleen Leean Armstrong

My third child, born two years after two beautiful identical-twin girls, appeared to be a healthy, big baby. We named her Stephanie, meaning "The Victor's Crown, Hope."

Stephanie. Plenty of beauty. An attractive child. "What beautiful eyes!" many commented. But something was wrong. She was 10 months old and too passive. She didn't respond to her loving aunties at our Montana reunion. My uncertain questions and concern over months of little eye contact, poor nursing, lack of expected developmental moves were accentuated by the concerns of my extended family.

We began developmental testing when she was one year old.

Stephanie. Now we know, my dear, that you're missing a tiny, almost imperceptible piece at the end of one chromosome—the one scientists have numbered 22. One tiny piece, but who knows how many genes are missing? And important

ones, according to the genetic specialists. Such a tiny piece . . . I want to scream! It can't be all that important!

But they say that you could find its conspicuous absence in every cell throughout her whole body. It's so hard to comprehend. But I know something is really missing. She's most five years old and she can't talk. When she was tested at the Hospital and Help Center, we found that she lacked many responses normal for a two- or three-month-old baby.

"Then God said, 'Let us make humanity in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion. . . . So God created humanity in his image'" (Genesis 1:26a, 27a, New Revised Standard Version).

The image of God—humanity. What does it mean? Who is included? It's simple, right? Any human offspring, anyone alive. Anyone?

"How's Stephanie doing?" A repeated question for us. Seventeen months of "patterning" and related home therapy to stimulate neurological growth, and has she progressed? Well, yes: she's quicker to feel pain, more verbal in babbling, leads you to what she wants, notices more people and things around her, entertains herself better with toys, walks better and, most recently, laughs frequently. But, it appears she still misses almost all the meaning of verbal language. She hasn't words of her own, even in rudimentary form.

Human—God's image. But are there levels of value? Are there some more human than others? Human beings look at beauty, intelligence,



er, social skills. God looks at the heart. But what's "the heart"?

I've been surprised by some inner struggles I've had. What if she isn't attractive? It would be hard. Why? What if she, like some children I've met in her early intervention classes, lacked the use of her body as well as her mind? Is there a hierarchy of value to humanness? **What makes us human?** Intellect, making choices, language? That one is dangerous. What is a human being without some form of language? Steffie may never have that. Her lowest developmental area. My husband, Randy, believes that ability to emit feelings is a large part of what it means to be created in God's image. God is emotional in the highest possible sense and has endowed this with us. So God must understand my tears while I write this. According to Randy's analysis, Steffie feels no question about that. She expresses strong desires, anger, joy, fear, I suspect that the most limited

individual has some way of expressing emotions.

Stephanie, I long for you to understand fully and to talk to us. I long for your total healing, for the miracle that would thrust you into the mainstream of life's challenges, joys and sorrows. But we may be facing quite a different future with you. And if you were healed tomorrow, could I put to rest the questions you've raised?

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs" (Luke 18:16, NRSV).

Lord Jesus, give me more of your understanding and love. ■

Darleen Leean Armstrong has taught elementary school and has been a missionary in the Philippines with SEND, International. Now she and her husband and three daughters (pictured above) live near Portland, Oregon.



New Wine and New Wineskins

Fern Lee Hagedorn

Last summer we decided to further our outreach by intentionally inviting children from other neighborhoods into our congregation's two-week vacation church school. Our recruitment efforts succeeded beyond our expectations: children came who had never before been to church.

But we weren't fully prepared. There weren't enough books, chairs or table space. The noise level in the parish hall where classes were being held was ear-splitting. The newcomers scared the "regulars" with their explosive behavior.

My preteen group was made up primarily of boys and girls who had little experience with church. One started climbing the baptismal font,

another raced down the aisle of nave, and a few used language questionable for any setting.

As I tried to speak to them about the love of God, paper airplanes and pencils flew through the air. I could not keep the children's attention. I raised my voice and it became hoarse. I isolated children who were making trouble. As I was losing my composure, Joey shouted, "I don't want to be here! This is just like school." What did Joey mean? How was this experience "just like school"—and why was that bad?

I quickly discovered that many of the children in the vacation church school, including many from within our congregation, were not reading up to their grade levels. So when we used pamphlets or books as the central focus for our learning, we were erecting barriers between them and God. The children who were good readers also had their moments of boredom. The activities were fun, but it wasn't clear what a kite made of a plastic garbage bag said about God's love.

When vacation church school came to an end, the newcomers wanted it to continue. We must a-

e something right. But Joey's
ds still haunted me.

God had answered our prayers: we
nt newcomers, and God sent
m to us. But we weren't fully pre-
pared.

No one pours new wine into old
wineskins. The new wine would
swell and burst the old skins. Then
the wine would be lost, and the skins
would be ruined. New wine must be
poured only into new wineskins" (Luke
7:38, Contemporary English Ver-
sion).

Our society is in the midst of a revo-
lution—a media revolution. Many
young people are relying chiefly on
television, computers and other tech-
nologies for information and enter-
tainment. "Seeing it on TV" makes
something true. "Seeing it on TV"
makes something desirable. Most ev-
ery family in our congregation—rich
or poor—has a television set, a VCR,
and a connection to cable TV.

According to Dr. Thomas E.
Womershine, professor of New Testa-
ment at United Theological Semi-
nary in Dayton, Ohio, and research
consultant to the American Bible So-
ciety's multimedia translations pro-
ject, the people of God have always
used the most popular communica-
tion media of the day to spread God's
word. In the early church, the stories

of God and Jesus were passed on
orally. These stories were then writ-
ten down so that they could be re-
counted aloud to newcomers. Chris-
tians were among the first to use an
early form of the book, the *codex*, in
which sheets were folded and words
written on both sides. Gutenberg's
printing press was "claimed" by
Christians:

Bibles were
printed. Writ-
ing and print-
ing made the
stories of God
available to
be heard in
family and
public wor-
ship settings.
And in Ger-
many the re-
former Mar-
tin Luther
translated the Bible into the every-
day language of the people.

We wanted
newcomers,
and God
sent them to
us. But we
weren't fully
prepared.

In the 19th century, a shift oc-
curred. Books, including the Bible,
increasingly were being read in si-
lence—and in private. Another ma-
jor change began in 1941, when the
first commercial television licenses



were issued in the United States. Today, 98 percent of all U.S. households have at least one color television set. By 1995, 85 percent of our homes will have videocassette recorders.

The printed page no longer commands the authority it had prior to the electronic revolution. The print medium will continue to be vital and necessary for communication and for Bible publishing, but the book as an "intimate" medium is being replaced by television and other visual technologies. To continue to be a vehicle by which God intimately relates to

people, churches must claim and explore new media for the proclamation of the gospel.

For the sake of Joey and all who thirst for God, now is the time to pour new wine into new wineskins. ■

Fern Lee Hagedorn, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, is a church communicator and video producer. A long-time volunteer church school teacher, she also works for the American Bible Society directing its project on multimedia translations of the Bible.

One "new-wine approach" to telling the good news

has been the American Bible Society's research into the possibility of translating the Scriptures into audiovisual media. It's known as the Multimedia Translations Project.

As part of the project, an interactive computer program has been developed. Designed for a teenage and young adult audience, the program explores the biblical story of Jesus healing a man with demons (Mark 5:1-20). The program, presently available on videodisc and transferable to other formats, operates through a personal computer. A film translation of the story from Mark titled "Out of the Tombs" can also be viewed on a computer.

Users are drawn further into biblical study through a variety of computer menu selections, such as: viewing a modern video translation of the passage; reading more about the text, viewing video segments on the history and geog-



raphy of the times; making one's own slide show; keeping a journal; comparing different biblical texts and languages; viewing versions of the Bible story in rap, chant and meditative styles; and watching a teen-produced response to the story.

This program uses a mixture of media—text, graphics, audio and motion video—as it seeks to share the gospel with teenagers and young adults in exciting and effective ways. For more information, call the American Bible Society at (212) 408-1200.—FLH

The Open Nest

Ted Schroeder



ir house
their re-
ationship
ewed the
s of wear
40 years
pring. I had
e to make a
-in call. I
t most of
hour with
listening

em complain about their aches
pains and debate the merits of
rent brands of muscle rub. I
d not help them. Neither could I
them when I visited again sev-
weeks later, and we repeated the
e discussion.

could never find them home.
y were always gone somewhere.
was the driving force behind the
pantry and free clothing closet
the church, and he coached three
rent soccer teams. When I would
with them, they'd tell of great
s or concerts or plays they had
yed. They took courses at a col-
, visited the battlefields of the
I War, compared collections at
museums and often sought out
e they called "old friends" in oth-
arts of the country.

oth couples were in their 80s.
h had raised families. Both
ed their own homes. But there

the similarity
ended. How
come? Why the
difference? The
reasons may
have been
many, but the
roots of the dif-
ference lay
years in the
past.

They say
that mid-life brings a crisis. We hear
it so often that we almost feel left out
if we don't have one. Yet, for most of
us, what happens in mid-life isn't so
much a crisis as a muddle. Every-
thing seems to settle. There's a kind
of mushiness to the present and a
lack of definition to the past.

To top it off, just about the time
we've got really mired in the mid-life
muddle, the children leave. The nest
is empty, as they say. And there we
are—the two of us—staring into one
another's eyes over the breakfast ta-
ble and wondering what to do to put
some excitement back into the turn-
ing of the days. No more errands,
school meetings, concerts, football
games. No more dating crises and
runs to the store to get that last-min-
ute dress or pair of shoes. Nothing
but a strange quiet in the house and
a gray pall over our future together.

It's a crisis point for those it hits,

all right. But the crisis is not something we suffer, but rather a cross point—a choice point. We face a real choice over how to respond to our muddled life, hollow house and taken-for-granted relationships. We can let our lives narrow into emptiness. Or we can see ourselves, our homes and our relationship as open to new growth, new possibilities, new excitement, new horizons.

God would give us the abundant life (see John 10:10)—not just when we're young, but throughout life. We do not, after all, stop learning or growing when we reach a certain age. God would equip us for growth and have us imitate Christ for the sake of others, not just in our "prime years" or only as long as children are home—but for all of our life.

Of course, it isn't easy. The muddle is seductive. It's easier to choose muscle rubs than to choose change. Ruts are at least predictable. An empty house and an empty life are not demanding. We can get used to the hollow sounds.

Or we can take the challenge of the "open nest" and open our relationships and our lives to what God would have us be and do.

Now this article is not written by an expert who has completely overcome the seduction of the couch, nor escaped the pull of the muddle in the middle. But here are a few suggestions for beginning to fill the open nest and our lives.



1. Surprise yourselves (and others who observe you). Do at least one thing every week that no one would expect you to do. Make it an adventure. Try something "outrageous." Laugh.

2. Take time for spiritual growth. Turn off the television. Be quiet alone, or together with your spouse, or a friend. Read Scripture. Read something that has meaning for you. Think. Reflect. Meditate. Pray (see Matthew 6:5).

3. Do something to renew a relationship. (Relationships in a marriage don't rejuvenate by themselves.) If you are married, go on a marriage retreat. Or go away for a weekend (away from the television and the phone). Spend your time together, talking with, and listening to, each other. Intentionally put away the hurts of the past, assess and thank God for the present, and lean

future together. End the time note of anticipation and prom-

ive something away every week. Money may be the easiest for us, but time and effort are more rewarding (see Galatians 6:9).



alk to one of your children or friend for at least half an hour (on the phone or in person)—and listen. Don't give advice; don't tell them about your aches and pains; don't say anything. Just listen.



Start at least one new hobby a year. You don't have to finish any of them—putting them away in the closet is OK. But start a new one every year. (Getting out an old one and starting it counts as "new.")

Find something true . . . honest . . . just . . . pure . . . pleasing . . . commendable . . . [of] excellence

. . . worthy of praise . . . (see Philippians 4:8) and think about it—"use" it, do it, share it. Read a book that fits this Philippians' description. If possible, read it with someone else and talk about it.

8. Say "thank you" to God for the people, events, opportunities, experiences that fill your life; and say "thank you" to others for the gifts and graces you offer one another (see Colossians 3:14-17).

No doubt you can think of many more suggestions. These actions do not constitute a shortcut to true happiness. Nor will any of the above create perfection. None will take all the heart and body aches out of living. None will solve all problems and quiet all fears. But they will begin to create an atmosphere—a spirit of growth that can last our whole lives.

As we learn to lean with anticipation into God's future, we will continue to grow by the power of God's Spirit. And as we grow, we can expect God's presence and blessing. We can expect the abundant life that has been promised.

Happy nesting.

The Rev. Ted Schroeder, Hoffman Estates, Illinois, a former parish pastor, serves as specialist for adult and leadership resource development for the Division for Congregational Ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.



Accessibility

Betty Westrom Skold



Bill and the boys were busy shingling the roof.

Far below in her wheelchair our grandchild watched them positioning the shingles, pounding the nails.

The other kids were running and laughing and swinging, but for Kristen there was only the rooftop.

And I remembered how she had always loved stairways, Lord. For her it had been joy just to sit at the foot of the steps, to watch other kids scrambling up and down. Adventure can seem out of reach for the child who will never climb.

But if she couldn't climb, she could at least be close to where the climbing was. Something in her spirit climbed too.

Now, for Kristen, adventure was up there on the rooftop, out of reach. "Could I go up there?" she asked. We all smiled and fell silent.

Jeff was silent, too, thinking things out. Then he gently scooped his daughter from her chair and carried her up the ladder, slowly, pausing on every rung.

Jeff carefully set her down by a bundle of shingles. She perched

there for minutes, leaning down the treest with disbelief and wonder. The sunlight shone on

her curly hair, and Kristen was like a queen, smiling down on her realm.

When she was back in her chair safe, we were all relieved, but glad, too, glad that it had happened. It had been a good trade-off, a small risk for a large adventure. Father love had made even the rooftop accessible.

I have longings, too, Father. My goals seem out of reach. I have neither the strength nor the spirit to achieve them.

But you understand my longings, God. You come to me where I am.

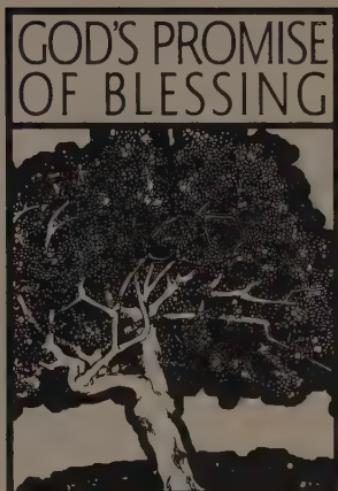
I am carried by your strength to a higher place. For me, too, Father makes all things accessible. ■

Betty Westrom Skold (pictured above) with her granddaughter Kristen) lives with her husband in Hopkins, Minnesota. She was formerly a woman's page editor for the Faribault (Minnesota) Daily News and a writer for the National Lutheran Council.

Session 9

The Blessing of Prayer in the Family of God

Judith A. VanOsdol-Hansen
Robert J. LaRiviere



Scripture Basis: Matthew 5:43—7:29

Scripture Study Text: Matthew 6:1-34

Session Overview

Through the gift of praying to God as *Abba*, meaning “Father,” Jesus makes his disciples members of the family of God.

Evening

Give us ever-new meaning, O Lord, in the familiar words of your prayer. Teach us to find strength in a closer relationship with the Father who knows all our needs. Strengthen our love for our sisters and brothers in your one holy family. Amen.

Understanding the Word

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18. The Lord’s Prayer is surrounded by what may be some of Jesus’ most challenging teachings. They call for complete trust in God. Note that almsgiving (verses 2-4), prayer (verses 5-8), and fasting (verses 16-18) are to be done in private.

However, if however, a person is primarily seeking public recognition for what has been done, then these acts of piety do bring human praise, but not divine blessing (verse 1). For those who follow Jesus Christ, these verses tell us God’s approval is sufficient reward.



God cannot be fooled. People may be impressed with images, but God sees the heart. When we take this insight seriously, everything has a different perspective. Then all of life becomes an act of faith centered in prayer.

1

Look again at the verses just read. How does the outward appearance of those who practice their piety (giving alms—donations—to the poor, praying, and fasting) compare with the actions of those who do these things in secret? Which of these people, at first glance, might seem more devoted to God? What does the text tell us about what God looks for in a person? What do you think God looks for in a person?

Read verses 7-8. The Gentiles are non-Jews who do not know the true God. Surrounded by stories of many gods, they make long lists of every known god. Their prayers are offered to all these gods, resulting in a long “heap” of “empty phrases” (verse 7). These prayers are futile attempts to appease the many gods they fear can affect their lives. Such are not hypocritical prayers—the Gentiles think they are doing right in reciting incantations—but rather they are expressions of superstition and fear stemming from ignorance.

2

Jesus mentions three approaches to prayer in these verses: 1) hypocritical in verses 5, 16; 2) pagan in verse 7; and 3) the way of his disciples in verses 6, 8. What do you think is a greater temptation for you—praying to the wrong “gods” (that is, trusting in the wrong things) or praying for the reasons that are less than God-pleasing? How can the Lord’s Prayer help us to pray in a way that is truly pleasing to God?

3

Together with instruction on prayer, Jesus teaches his disciples about almsgiving (verses

and fasting (verses 16-18). What do these activities have to do with prayer? What place, if any, do almsgiving and fasting have in the Christian life today?

In verse 9. The word Jesus uses for "Father" in this verse is "Abba". In Aramaic, the language of Jesus, the first words of a child were "abba" (daddy) and "imma" (mommy). They were the common and affectionate terms that bound together members of a family and distinguished them from other families. Adults and children alike used these words to address their own parents, and no one else. Jesus' concern is not simply to teach his disciples to call God "Daddy." Rather, in Jesus' prayer, the "Our Father" teaches us that we belong in the family of God.

Jesus wants his disciples to know they can pray with the assurance that they are indeed God's beloved sons and daughters. Jesus teaches his disciples to address God intimately, with a childlike trust and a loyalty that exist only within a loving family. The Lord's Prayer is one of the great gifts Jesus gives to his followers. It can be the foundation for a trusting and personal relationship with God.

The Lord's Prayer invites us to enter into the same closeness that is shared with God.



4

The Lord's Prayer is also a community prayer. The salutation "Our Father" means that all Christians are members of the same family. Our intimacy with God cannot be separated from our intimacy with our brothers and sisters, children of the same Father. Think of a situation where you have prayed the Lord's Prayer with other Christians. How did the prayer affect your attitude toward God? Toward the other Christians praying with you?

5

Jesus says, "Your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (verse 8). What, then, do you think is the purpose of prayer?

Read verses 6:9-10. “Hallowed be your name,” “Your kingdom come,” and “Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,” the first three petitions of the Lord’s Prayer, are closely related to one another.

God’s name represents God’s identity. This is profaned when those who claim to be followers of God do evil and call it good, twist the word of God and make it their own, worship false gods, or neglect the needs of their sisters and brothers while praising God with words alone.

With the coming of the kingdom of God, all the evil in the heart will be revealed. That evil will be cast out; and the humble, the meek, the peacemakers, the persecuted, and all who picked up their crosses to follow Jesus will be blessed.

Remember the Beatitudes, from Session 1? “Your kingdom come” is a prayer for God to break into history and establish the kingdom in its fullness and perfection. It is also a prayer that life on this earth will be, for all people, as close to the kingdom as possible. Whenever this happens, even in the smallest way, God’s name is hallowed.

Those who pray “Your will be done” offer themselves as instruments of God in establishing the kingdom. Such an offer is not a resignation to fate. It is a dynamic prayer for two things: 1) to see where the name of God is being profaned, and 2) to respond to human need—through word and deed—so that others “may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (5:16).

6

Many people pray “Your will be done” only at a point of desperation when there is nowhere else to turn. But can this prayer be a foundation for daily living in ordinary times as well as in distress? How so? See 7:24-27. What do these verses say about faith in ordinary times and faith in crisis? If we live each day praying “thy will be done,” how does this prepare us for hard times?

Read 6:11-15. The petition for daily bread expresses a simple yet powerful trust. If we trust God to provide for our basic needs, we can lie down at night, and sleep peacefully, and wake in the morning to live another day in God’s grace. This is what Jesus wants for his disciples.

7

Have you ever known a time when you lacked "bread" or basic human needs such as housing, employment, or medical care? What does this experience teach you about faith?

Peace also comes from forgiving and being forgiven (verse 12). Forgiveness is the true mark of the family of God. A common conception is that the word "as" in verse 12 means God forgives us only in the same measure that we forgive others. This interpretation, however, denies the fullness and perfection of Jesus' death on the cross.

Further, our forgiving others is a sign of our faith and gratitude for the great and complete forgiveness we have received as a free gift (see 18:23-35).

The ending of the prayer (6:13) recognizes our own limitations and asks that we will be protected and rescued from situations that threaten to take us away from the family of God.

8

Read verses 14-15. God has freely forgiven us; now we have a responsibility to forgive others. Read 7:16-20. How might this apply to our own lives? What effect does our relationship with God have on our relationships with other people?



Read 6:19-34. To "store up for yourselves treasures on earth" (verse 19) is to trust in your own power to save and protect yourself (see Luke 12:13-21). A heart that treasures the things of this world cannot pray for the kingdom and will of God.

9

Read 6:22-23. The eye in these verses may stand for the heart. What does it mean to say "if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light"? What do you think it would take to live without trusting in God?

10

Question nine leads logically into the question of which master we serve, God or wealth (verse 24). "Wealth" includes, but is not limited to, money. How do we know which master we are serving? Read verses 11 and 33. How can each of these verses help keep us from serving the wrong master?

Interpreting the Word

The love of righteousness (verse 33) and the command not to worry (verse 25) go together. God finds innumerable ways to provide for our needs, and this is often done through the community of believers. We not only receive God's benevolence, we pass it on to others.

11

How do you think trusting that "your Father who sees in secret will reward you" (verse 18) might make Christian life and community unique in the ways that people relate to each other?

The gospel text for Ash Wednesday is Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21. This may seem like a strange choice of text, since Ash Wednesday focuses on our mortality and these verses do not mention death. Also, Ash Wednesday is the first day of the season of self-examination and penance, yet these verses have no call to repentance.

However, these verses from Chapter 6 do offer a new and refreshing perspective on life. The true disciple does not need the praise and recognition prized so much by the world. God's approval and blessing are sufficient, whether other people praise or blame us. God's blessing is permanent; all else fades away and dies.

Death puts all of life in perspective. Things that seemed to matter so much become trivial in the face of death. These verses focus on a heart that trusts and seeks God above all else.

That is the only response to mortality that brings peace and prepares a person for death. All who truly pray the Lord's Prayer have died to this world and have been reborn as children in the eternal family of God.

ing the Word

12

Martin Luther taught that we live in two kingdoms. All Christians belong to the kingdom of God. All others belong to the kingdom of this world. Christians, however, must live and serve in this world, but their hearts are in the kingdom of God. How do you think we can successfully live in both worlds? If we are to live our lives in hopeful anticipation of God's kingdom, on what must we concentrate?

It is extremely difficult not to seek praise and recognition for what we do. God knows our deeds of mercy, but it is gratifying to us humans if other people know too. This is not all bad, unless *acclaiming our deeds are our primary goal.*

Sometimes it is good to receive recognition, and it is good for us to give credit where credit is due. Christians must be cautious, however, lest the rewards of this world distract us from our true treasure: God's kingdom and his righteousness.

Life in tension between the kingdoms is made possible by prayer to Abba, Father, who makes us children of God and gives us unconditional love. We must daily reclaim our membership in the family of God, so that worldly treasures don't tear us away from God's family and leave us isolated. The Lord's Prayer is the foundation upon which abundant and eternal life is built.

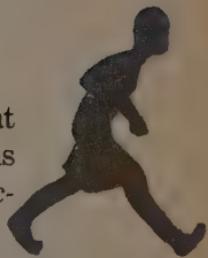
Looking Ahead

In Session 10 we will explore in more detail the nature of life in the family of God by studying the description of community found in Matthew 18:1-35.

Rev. Judith VanOsdol-Hansen is pastor of Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chicago, Illinois; the Rev. Robert LaRiviere is pastor of Christ Evangelical Church in Schoernersville, Pennsylvania.

This Promise of Blessing: A Study of the Gospel of Matthew was prepared by the Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America under the direction of the Rev. Ivis LaRiviere-Mestre, Editor. Contributing Editor: The Rev. Dr. Henry Koester. Copyright © 1992 Augsburg Fortress. May not be reproduced without permission.

Comments and questions relating to the Bible study should be sent to the Rev. Karen Battle, Director for Educational Resources, Women of the ELCA, 100 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631-4189.



FAITH

Brought Me This Far

Debra Illingworth Greene

Delores Wilson remembers well her first experience with the Holy Spirit.

"My children were young then. My husband and I had a quarrel one night—a heated argument. Sometime later the same subject came up again," she explained. "He had gone out but I knew he was coming back. I just wanted to become humble and I didn't want to argue."

"I prayed and asked God to take that feeling of anger from me. It seemed like a weight was lifted off my shoulder," she recalled. "I really couldn't understand why. They say God knows your heart, and deep down inside he must have known me better than myself."

"When my husband came in I said, 'Honey, I love you,' and put my arms around him. He looked at me like I had flipped. I didn't know that when you pray, your prayers can be answered that quick!"

Now a great-grandmother and member of Holy Family

Lutheran Church in Chicago, Delores learned a lot through that experience. "I always think back to that day when God really helped me," she said.

And she's turned to God for help many times since.

There was an especially difficult time when her mother lost a leg to diabetes, and then Delores' youngest son was shot on his way to a dance. Doctors told her that the bullet lodged in her son's body couldn't be removed. She says now that after visiting her son in the hospital, she almost had a nervous breakdown.

"When I went to work I was sitting at my desk and tears just started coming down. I didn't even realize I was crying. A lot of people in the hallway were looking at me . . . and the boss came into the office. He looked at me and just kept going. Nothing was even going through my mind. I don't know what happened until the next day."

Delores Wilson, with the Cabrini-Green housing project in background.

n't remember. The whole thing was like having a concussion.

"The next day my boss came by and said, 'Dee, I'm going to put this under the glass on your desk and when you have time I want you to read it.' " Delores thought it was more work and she didn't want to read it until she completed the work she was doing.

When she returned to her desk, she found the Serenity Prayer. She thanked her boss and he said, "Dee, there are many things you're worrying about."

"That's probably why I was crying," Delores recounted. "I couldn't remove the bullet. I couldn't put my mother's leg back on. I couldn't help that situation. Now things like that, things I have no control over—I take it to the Lord and leave it."

She has forgiven the man who last July killed her son Michael, who was 40. "I have learned that I am supposed to



love my neighbor as myself, and with the help of God, I can forgive. I know that the devil is busy," she said. "I know God had nothing to do with my son being killed. At the funeral I got up and let them know that my son loved God and there's nothing we can do to bring him back. But I know I will be with my son again. The main thing to know is that God is real; you just have to believe. You have to thank God for all of your blessings."

One of her blessings, Delores says, is serving as president of her building in the Cabrini-Green housing project, where she has lived for 34 years. For seven years she has been in a training pro-

gram, learning about resident management. Hers was the only Cabrini-Green building chosen for the program. She has traveled to other cities for resident management conventions and has met Jack Kemp, United States Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. She speaks proudly of the grants her building recently received for its rehabilitation.

"This [rehabbing] has opened up jobs for our residents," Delores said. "We know how to write up propos-

don't just see the bad things. When you see a patch of grass, be thankful for the patch. I tell them to see the beauty in life, instead of the negative things."

As a child, Delores had attended church. "I decided as an adult I wouldn't go until I was grown and ready," she said. When she was ready, she tried Holy Family. "The first time I came here I hated it. It's hard learning how to be a Lutheran and found more things to hate."

But halfway into that first service, she recalls, "God spoke to me and said, 'Pay attention to what is being said.' So I paid attention and it was time for the sermon—and I could understand it. The pastor brought it down to things in everyday life. I listened and it was like reading a good novel. I didn't want him to stop. When the music came I wasn't paying attention to the words. After a while I could not wait until Sunday."

Some years ago Delores spoke about her first encounter with Lutheranism to a gathering of Lutherans in Minnesota. "I ended the talk by saying, 'It doesn't matter if you're from Cabrini-Green or the rural areas, or Beirut, we only hope any of us has faith in Christ Jesus.'" ■

"Now, things I have no control over— I take it to the Lord and leave it."

als and send out for bids." Asked if faith had anything to do with what's happened in her building, she responded, "Girl, if it wasn't for faith. . . . Our building's motto is 'Faith brought us this far.' I know that's what brought me this far."

At Holy Family Lutheran, Delores serves as Sunday school superintendant. Each Sunday she talks to all the children before they break into classes. She tells them, "Everything God has made is good. When you go outside

Debra Illingworth Green is news editor of The Lutheran

Nurturing an Adult Faith

Connie Leean

True or false?

- In the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America we do a good job of nurturing the faith of children and junior high youth—surpassing almost all other mainline Protestant denominations in the percentage of young people attending church classes.
- In the ELCA we do a less-than-good job of nurturing the faith of high school youth.
- In the ELCA we do a decidedly less-than-good job of nurturing adults.

If you think all these statements are true, you are right—at least according to a recent study.

Search Institute in Minneapolis, Minnesota, studied the effectiveness of Christian education in various denominations* and learned that in the ELCA, 67 percent of the children and 70 percent of confirmation-age youth took part in Christian education. But for youth in grades 10-12 the participation dipped to 32 percent, and for adults it tumbled to a dismal 20 percent.

As I travel about the ELCA and talk about these numbers, I find that most people aren't surprised. They know how hard it is to attract adults to Sunday school, weekday Bible study, or issue forums. In the hectic lives of most adults, religious instruction ranks low on their list of things to do.

So what if Christian education reaches only a small segment of adults? Haven't they been educated pretty well by now? Well, consider this: According to the Search Institute study, almost half of ELCA adults have a faith that can be described as "undeveloped," that is, not showing a commitment to grow in either their relationship to God or in their expression of concern and compassion for others in need.

The same study found that participation over time in effec-

**Selective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations—A Report for the ELCA* (March, 1990). A packet containing the report is available from the ELCA Distribution Service, 1-800-4648, for \$12.00 plus shipping and handling, code 69-8209.

Almost half of ELCA adults have a faith that can be described as “undeveloped.”

tive Christian education contributes most to maturing of faith. And so, the big question: If we are not able to attract more adults to some form of continuing Christian education beyond confirmation, how can we expect to have a denomination of committed and growing Christians?

In the past 10 years, research based on James W. Fowler's book *Stages of Faith* has consistently found that a majority of adults are stuck in a faith stage most appropriate for adolescents. These adults have received and accepted their faith tradition as they were taught, but they do little critical reflection on faith matters.

Why is this?

According to a 1987 study by the Religious Education Association, “Faith Development in the Adult Life Cycle,” to mature in faith a person must resolve challenges similar to those needed to mature psychologically and socially. These challenges, based on the work of psychoanalyst Erik Erikson, include learning to trust, taking initiative and establishing

intimacy. Life experiences that are not effectively dealt with can not only get in the way of growing as a person, but can also get in the way of growing in faith. For example, someone who hasn't learned to trust others, or feels overwhelmed by guilt, may have a difficult time deepening their faith.

For many adults in the early middle years (35- to 45-year-old “baby boomers”), the study found, the challenge causing the greatest obstacle to maturing in faith is the need to establish intimacy, which allows a person to be open and vulnerable with others.

Tex Sample in the book *U.S. Lifestyles and Mainline Churches* (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990) points to a major challenge in attracting young and middle-age baby-boomer adults to our congregations—whether for worship or for learning: Baby boomers have been profoundly affected by the ethic of *self-fulfillment*. However, their parents and grandparents have been shaped by the ethic of *self-denial*. If we apply this to a learning context, then, one type of adult education opportunity is not likely to attract all ages of adults.

Men and women in the baby-boomer generation are settling down and establishing their “take-charge” identity; but for their spiritual side to grow, they have to learn how to let go

become open, vulnerable, compassionate to others. This is an expression of intimacy that takes commitment and some self-denial. According to Tex Sample, many baby boomers are ready for this new challenge, because of their long commitments to issues of peace and justice.

reaching out to adults, congregational leaders in Christian education should take their strategy cues from master teacher/rabbi, Jesus. The familiar story of Jesus and the disciples on the road to Emmaus highlights how Jesus taught throughout his ministry. Read carefully the story in Luke 24:13-35 and see many ideas you can add to your list of educational tips for nurturing faith.

Walk along with people who are busy; use natural situations for teaching.

Start any teaching with questions to find out where people are and what they are concerned or excited about.

When it's clear that people are not understanding the core message of the gospel, examine the patterns of God's action throughout the history of these people.

Breaking bread with people is not only a hospitable thing to do, it can become the occasion for teaching in an informal setting and for sharing journeys, hopes and dreams.

Participation over time in effective Christian education contributes most to maturing of faith.

Congregations need to learn how to nurture adults. Leaders need to understand what psycho-social issues adults are facing, especially those harder-to-reach baby boomers who struggle with identity and intimacy. Congregations need to offer hospitable contexts for nurturing of faith in ways that:

- **meet people where they are**
- **use natural and informal situations for learning**
- **match content for learning with people's real questions about faith and life, and**
- **link fellowship and learning in a context of caring. ■**

Connie Leean directs program planning in Christian education for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America through the Division for Congregational Ministries. Recently she helped produce a leader training video for the new CROSS SIGNS Bible study series for adults.



Brief Prayers on News Items

Sonia C. Groenewold

♦ Pastor urges compromise on logger-owl debate

The Rev. Melanie Martin-Dent, coordinator of the Harbor Churches Timber Outreach in Washington State, promotes discussion and compromise between unemployed timber workers and environmentalists trying to protect the endangered spotted owl. Both sides will have to yield some ground, Martin-Dent says. "We're going to have to accept that there may be some cost to human beings and cost to the species," she said.

O God, guide us in our attempts to care for all of creation.

♦ ELCA congregations serve people with disabilities

Joan Van De Wall of Reformation Lutheran Church, Rochester, New York, initiated a "Rainbow Class" at Reformation for people with disabilities. Each Sunday morning they have worship and sharing. Van De Wall expanded the program into a network of "Seed Groups" in the Upstate New York Synod. Each Wednesday night at several synod churches, these groups, which together serve some 400 people with disabilities, meet for worship, sharing and recreation.

God of all creation, help us make our congregations welcoming to all people.

♦ Hong Kong Christians call for care of creation

More than 200 people attended ecumenical service at Truth Lutheran Church in Hong Kong to celebrate World Day of Prayer in March. Participants prayed for reunified Germany, environmental issues in Austria, international church organizations in Switzerland and the poor in Hong Kong.

Light of the World, move us to prayerful action on behalf of all your creation.

♦ Lutheran agency helps combat cholera in Peru

As the cholera epidemic continues to spread in Peru, the Lutheran development agency Diaconia works to combat the disease. Diaconia carries out development work for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Peru. One program aims to provide 600 latrines for families in Celendín and Casma. Nine months ago, women attended a training course on hygiene and learned how to teach others in nearby villages.

Eternal God, ministry takes many forms. Open us to the myriad possibilities.

Remember to add to your daily prayer list people and issues in the news.

Sonia C. Groenewold is senior news editor of The Lutheran.

Don't be afraid, I'll hold your hand."

Adults often say these words to a child hesitant about taking a step forward: a first step, a step onto an escalator into an elevator. But these words were not spoken by an adult to a child. They were spoken to me by a kindly man who was, perhaps, 13 years old.

I was attending confirmation camp as one of several pastors in a cluster of churches. I will admit that I'm no brave outdoorsman! I especially have a problem with open heights. Give me a skydive any day, but when faced with an open gully or a footbridge without railings, I am paralyzed. And I stood, halfway back to cabin, unable to make my feet move. It was then that Jason spoke to me.

Don't be afraid. I'll hold your hand."

And when the diminutive, teenaged, soft-spoken African-American boy took the hand of this large, extroverted, forty-something Caucasian pastor, I was able to cross the bridge. I wasn't afraid.

The journey of faith is a lot like my brief, scary trip across that footbridge. It can be daunting to step forth bravely in faith on one's own. Strength and encouragement for the journey can come from others who are quite unlike us, even those who are much older—or much younger.

Every time a Baptism takes place, for instance, we are reminded that our faith life is shared with other generations. As a congregation we speak for the whole body of Christ when we address the newly baptized:

"We welcome you into the Lord's family. We receive you fellow members of the body of Christ, children of the one heavenly Father, and workers with us in the kingdom of God" (*Lutheran Book of Worship*, copyright © 1978, page 125).

Have you learned about God from a child lately? As I serve the children around the congregation I serve, I

Nurturing Between Generations

Donna Hacker Smith



Strength and encouragement for the journey can come from others who are quite unlike us.

am constantly impressed with their easy comfort church. Because they view God as a loving, accepting parent, they are able to relax and feel at home in God's house. Sometimes their easiness is uncomfortable to us grown-ups. At the times when I find my orderly adult nature upset by the spontaneity of children in worship, I remember our baptismal words of welcome. Perhaps these little ones are called to remind us of the unpredictability of the Holy Spirit!

During the children's sermon one Easter morning, the children and I were considering the word *Hallelujah*. We figured out that *Hallelu* meant "praise." I asked what the *jah* part of the word could possibly mean.

David, who was about four at the time, ventured a guess. "Isn't that what you say when you want to make a donkey get moving?"

Of course everyone laughed, but I assured David that his answer was okay—just not the one I happened to be looking for. There are so many opportunities for children in our church to teach us, but I suspect many times they are like a donkey who just won't "get moving"!

Our youth want to be fully involved in church, including—but not limited to—youth programs. They want more than token involvement in the "adult" church. Our young adult members have insights and questions of faith to share with us and a desire to prod us into the lively dynamic interaction with God that is natural at their age.

A highlight of the church year for me is the annual Youth Sunday. In the past I worked with our youth preachers to polish their messages to perfection. Now we have learned to relax and be nurtured by the more challenging and spontaneous style of these fellow travelers on the path of faith. In turn, their authentic messages have inspired me deeply.

Younger to older, older to younger. The action of faith and nurture is not restricted to any particular direction. How might this intergenerational nurture of faith become a reality in our churches?

Some questions to consider:

1. Is there at least one "child-friendly" action in every service: a children's sermon, easy-to-learn hymn, blessing at the communion rail? Are children taught the liturgy?

Sunday school or children's choir? Is the nursery cheerful, clean, safe and easily found?

Are people of all ages encouraged to serve in the worship roles they can handle? Parents and children can serve together as ushering or greeting teams. Many youth enjoy the role of lector or worship assistant.

Would members of your parish welcome mentoring programs (often as part of confirmation study) or an "adopt-a-grandparent" program? Variations on the theme include having youth in the parish serve as a sponsor at baptism, usually in addition to the sponsors chosen by the family.

How often does your parish sponsor programs and activities—from church picnics to social ministry projects—that foster intergenerational involvement? A talent night, game night, or other intergenerational recreational activity can encourage a kind of mutual respect and understanding that can lead to stronger sharing of faith across generational lines.

Do you encourage retired members to teach Sunday school, share their expertise in social ministry projects, mentor youth in confirmation and find ways to share their faith stories?

Are senior members asked to serve in worship leadership roles?

Is the bulletin and worship book available in large print? Is there adequate sound amplification?

How easy, or difficult, is it to get into—and around—our church?

Does Youth Sunday have a counterpart? How about "Senior Sunday"? This is one way to recognize the stories and insights older members have to share.

Opening ourselves to members of the body of Christ—of all ages—opens us to the delightful surprises of the Holy Spirit. And it may even lead you across the footbridge at confirmation camp! ■

Anna Hacker Smith is pastor of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Freeport, Illinois. She particularly enjoys nurturing the faith of her eight stepgrandchildren.



Younger to older, older to younger. The action of faith is not restricted to any particular direction.



"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 5:10

The Community

Barbara Jurgensen

Betty was trembling as she walked into the September church council meeting.

"What's the matter?" Martha asked.

"Well. . . ." It took Betty a few moments to catch her breath and go on. "Steve and I were sitting on the stoop out front of our building a few minutes ago. . . . I told you that the Psychos want him to join their gang. . . ."

"Yeah."

"He's been kind of small for his age, but this summer he did a lot of growing, and now they can't seem to leave him alone. They just keep after him something awful. The other day one of their biggest guys grabbed him and wanted to know what the dove pin on his shirt was for. When Steve told him it was from Sunday school, the guy told him, 'When you're in the gang we'll knock that church stuff outta you fast!'

"Now that school's started, Steve waits till everyone's gone

by in the morning, then makes a dash for it. After school it's worse because the Psychos take their time walking home. Sometimes he hangs around school for an hour before he dares leave." She wiped her eyes, then went on.

"Well, about half an hour ago while we were on the stoop, this big black car with a fancy 'P' on the front door wheeled around the corner. It stopped in front of us, and four guys jumped out and started walking toward us, swinging chains." She began to shake visibly, and Martha put her arm around her.

"Steve got the apartment door unlocked, and we ran inside." She began sobbing.

"Are you all right?" Jim, Martha's husband, asked. "Is Steve all right?"

"Yes . . . they couldn't get into the apartment. Steve got away from them today . . . but what about tomorrow . . . and the next day? If he tries to hold out much longer, maybe they'll do something to him just to make him an example to other kids who won't join the gang. . . ."

hen Steve told him
e dove pin was from
nday school, the guy
d him, 'When you're in
e gang we'll knock that
urch stuff outa you fast!'

m cleared this throat. "This
ighborhood's turned into a
n place. I don't know what
tha and I would do if we had
ise our two boys here today."

artha nodded. "I think I'd try
ove."

ometimes I wish I could,"
y said, "but since Steve's dad
s 10 years ago, we've had to
e do on what I can earn. This
e only place I can afford . . .
I don't have a car."

o what we're talking about,"
said lost in thought, "is some
to get Steve to school and
without the Psychos getting
"

ow Oscar spoke up. "I've been
king about all the time Steve
nds waiting around after
ol every afternoon. We live
t across the street from the
ol. I'd be glad to pay him to
me around the house and
, then I'd drive him home."
nd I drive past the school ev-
morning," Liz said. "What
e does Steve have to be
e?"
y eight."

"Oh. I don't leave till eight-thir-
ty," Liz was disappointed.

"Well, I go by your corner about
seven-thirty," Jim said, "so tell
Steve to wait for me inside the
entryway. Tell him *not* to stand
outside. I'll honk."

Betty's eyes filled with tears. "I
don't know how to thank you . . .
all of you . . ."

As they took a few moments to
get some coffee and cookies, Jim
said to Oscar, "Martha says that
Steve doesn't remember his dad.
Maybe you and I can spend some
time with him." Oscar nodded his
head and smiled. ■

The Rev. Barbara Jurgensen is an assistant professor at Trinity Lutheran Seminary, Columbus, Ohio. This is the eighth in a series of stories based on the Beatitudes. Pastor Jurgensen's latest book, Following You: Conversations with Jesus (Augsburg, 1990; \$4.50), is available through Augsburg Fortress locations.

Retreat— and Conquer

Martha Orr Conn

As a longtime member of my congregation, I felt I knew almost everybody. Then an automobile accident kept me from attending services and other activities. When I was able to return, I felt like a stranger. Many familiar faces had disappeared, and I had no names to attach to new ones. To my dismay, I became one of the first to leave the church each week.

My desire to get reacquainted must have been the reason I agreed to attend the two-day retreat that the women of my church were planning. But after volunteering to be a driver, I faced some worrisome

second thoughts.

Did I really want to get involved in activities "for women only"? I had long harbored a secret suspicion that the women's monthly meetings held little purpose. I sighed. It was too late to back out now. Three women were depending on me for transportation.

It took less than two hours that Friday afternoon to drive to our church's camp, but by the time we got there, my back had reminded me that it didn't take kindly to extended automobile trips. Along with my aspirin, I had to choke down a feeling of being the new kid in school. As more cars arrived, the other retreaters

seemed to greet each other as old friends.

Pushing away my shy feelings, I pitched in to help set up the tables, chairs and bedding. Our last chore was selecting the meal for which we'd serve on clean committee. After that it was "do your own thing" time.

Some explored, some read, some dragged out a Ping-Pong table. I found cool seat outdoors and started crocheting baby booties for the church bazaar. Soon a woman about my age sat down beside me. "What are you making?" she asked.

I showed her some of the clever patterns I'd sent away for. After a short silence, she spoke. "Have you noticed how young most of these people are?" Uh-oh. Some else was experiencing "new kid in school" syndrome.

But somehow, along the way, the feeling of being outsiders disappeared. Maybe it was when we were cajoled into a Ping-Pong game, and I found I could still keep the ball in play.

Perhaps I felt more
alone after the
delicious dinner
prepared by two
volunteer cooks. It's
hard to feel discon-
nected when you're full
of lasagna, spinach
salad, and strawberry
shortcake.

By the time we
gathered for evening
worship, I'd forgotten
my misgivings. We
shared a silly memory
game, and I was
excited when I could
"name" all 18 of
the fellow campers. We
listened to some favorite
hymns, had a short
worship service and

...
Well, we were scheduled
to go to bed. I'd
missed this time,
I'd miss the
eloquent good-night
prayers of my family.
Somehow I was
too busy laughing at
the antics of the
cameramen photographing
us" and their
wives (who were
trying to escape being
photographed with a
teethful of toothpaste
in their faces full of cream).
The Thursday morning
was more structured—
and more tense. Our leader
reminded us, "The
purpose of a retreat is
to withdraw for spiri-

tual refreshment. If
you feel you can
achieve that better by
going off on your
own—walking, reading,
resting—please do
so."

Though the walk
was tempting, I
decided to attend the
Bible classes and
prayer time. During
the latter, some of us
found courage to speak

about our departures with
last-minute confi-
dences and
enthusiastic hugs, we
at last started for
home.

The next morning it
wasn't difficult to
linger and chat after
church. We had
the opportunity to introduce to
each other. And plans
were made for those
important monthly



meetings where our
sisters would help us
regain the spiritual
refreshment we had
found on retreat. ■

of private experiences
with the power of
prayer. As we opened
our hearts to each
other, I realized with
joy and gratitude that
a sense of special
friendship, of sister-
hood, was developing
among us.

"But we just got
here!" we all
complained as we
packed up the cars
that evening. After
putting off the inevita-

*Martha Orr Conn lives
with her husband, a
retired airline captain,
in a small airport
community in rural
Virginia. She enjoys
writing about her
learning experiences as
a wife, mother and
Christian.*

Dear Maria,

I hope you're planning to come to the triennial convention of the women's organization next year.

"God's Gift of Hope" is the theme of the convention, and it's scheduled for August 7-10, 1993, in Washington, D.C. At circle yesterday we saw a video, "A Chance of a Lifetime," which tells about the opportunities at the convention and Washington, and I've decided: I'm going! I've already started saving for it!

Would you like to room together? We had such a great experience in Anaheim, and I hear this convention is going to be even better. First, it's in the nation's capital, so we'll have a chance to see the special attractions, the monuments and museums, and the White House. And there will be a worship service at the National Cathedral on Friday evening (the night before the convention officially begins), worship experiences every day, and a new Bible study on hope. Nancy Amidei, a leading advocate for poor and hungry people, will be one of the major speakers. My friend Jennifer says she heard her speak at Interfaith Impact last year and everyone loved her.

On Monday at the convention there will be a "Convention without Walls," as they're calling it, where we can go to Capitol Hill or visit one of the social service and ministry programs in the city. We can also visit our congressional representatives, or talk with congressional staff.

Then Monday evening we'll celebrate the first five years of Women of the ELCA in a giant "Birthday Bash." That's one party I don't want to miss!

The speakers, the exhibit area, Bible studies, workshops and worship experiences are all going to connect to the theme "God's Gift of Hope." And I expect that we'll have lots of ideas and resources to take back to our congregational units. And I don't know about you, but I could use a God-centered time away, especially one that speaks of hope!

I have a feeling it's going to be a once-in-a-lifetime event. Are you coming?

*Love,
Sarah*



Watch for articles in LWT and the *Women of the ELCA Newsletter* for information about Women of the ELCA's Second Triennial Convention—August 7-10, 1993 in Washington, D.C.—or contact your Synodical Women's Organization triennial convention coordinator.

MISSION:

Action

Nurturing the Faith and Literacy

Iistorically, churches have played a key role in promoting literacy and other educational endeavors. The first book to be self-produced was the Bible.

With the development of the Sunday school, the world witnessed the greatest volunteer literacy movement in the history of the West. The original intent of the Sunday school was to teach the child laborers of 19th-century England to read.

In the United States, the Sunday school movement began just seven years after the Revolutionary War, in Philadelphia. It moved West along with the pioneers, and planted the seeds for education that the public would cultivate and later reap. African-American churches, like African Methodist Episcopal churches, developed their own Sunday schools. In some African-American communities, the Sunday school was the *only* school. Without it, there was no chance for individuals to learn to read.

With the establishment of universal public education in the U.S., churches began to focus on developing literacy programs abroad, in countries where the majority of the population was illiterate. It

was not until World War I and, especially World War II, that the degree of illiteracy in the U.S. came to light.

Today, local and national church bodies are increasingly sensitive to illiteracy and low-level literacy in the U.S. As a result, they are active in adult literacy for several reasons:

To enable non-readers to participate in the life of their churches. The written word is a key element in the corporate life of the church and in the devotional life of individual members.

To demonstrate the love of God. So many adults who enroll in literacy programs report their reason for learning to read is "to feel better about myself." How fitting to have them encounter God's love as they learn to read!

To work for social justice. Illiteracy rates are highest among those people who live on the margins of society.

Today, as in the past, church involvement in public education and literacy education is a nurturing ministry of the utmost importance. ■

*Faith Fretheim
Director for Literacy*

MISSION:

Growth

From Clumsy To Grace-Full

"I come here clumsy but I expect to leave grace-full."

"The event gave me the encouragement to speak about God and things important to my life."

These comments by participants in the 1992 theological conferences for women were echoed by others who found the conferences to be life-changing events.

Hosted and sponsored by church-wide Women of the ELCA, the events were held in four sites: Columbia, South Carolina; Thousand Oaks, California; Chicago, Illinois; and Lindsborg, Kansas.

One goal of the conferences, planned by a national committee and shaped by site committees, was to provide one program in multiple sites for any woman wanting to take part in theological study. The Rev. Barbara Rossing, an ELCA pastor now chaplain at Harvard Divinity School, made this goal a reality by serving as the conference theologian at all sites.

Participants prepared for the conference by thinking about *grace*. As they responded to "homework" questions, their work as theologians began.

The Rev. Carolyn Keller's article "What Is Theology?" from the July/August 1991 LWT helped participants to think about theology as the

coming together of Scripture, experience and imagination as they prepared for Pastor Rossing's presentations on grace. Three presentations delicately wove the concept of grace into everyday experiences that showed evidence of God at work:

Grace in meals: Jesus as Waiter

Grace in nature: God as Creator

Grace in relationships: the Holy

Spirit and our future.

Participants considered their response to God's grace. They reflected on grace as God's gift, their calling as stewards of God's grace, and the assurance that God is with us always.

Participants at each site responded to the understanding that theological study is important to the life of every Christian. The July/August 1991 issue of *Lutheran Woman Today* (on "Believers as Theologians") is a helpful place to begin a theological journey. The next series of *Vision* issues of the ELCA Theological Conference will probably take place in 1994.

However it is accomplished, theological study and reflection—*the combination of Scripture, experience and imagination*—helps us "grow in grace-fullness." ■

*Valora Starr
Director for Growth
and Witness*

MISSION:

*Community*Blessed to Care,
Blessed to Share

As you have met, prayed, studied and served together throughout the year, our prayer is that you have experienced again and again the blessing of God in your life. Our prayer is also one of thanksgiving, knowing how God's blessings flow forth from you as witness to God's care and presence in the lives of those around you. All of the staff of Women of the ELCA share your witness in letters, phone calls and faith stories exchanged at meetings. For this we truly give thanks.

This year again you have wonderful opportunities through your Thankofferings to share God's blessings. As part of the women's organization's "Gift to the Church," Thankofferings support the total outreach of the ELCA worldwide in ministries of fitness, education, leadership, and service and justice. Your Thankofferings also support ministries of Women of the ELCA, especially those that address needs and concerns of women and children living in poverty.

In 1992, your Thankofferings will support programs like these: sharing the good news behind prison walls; the church: a safe place for children; outreach to diverse cultures.

- Campus ministry: linking students with those in need
- Support for families in Peru
- Cows and cash for health and education in Kenya
- Fighting injustice through Inter-faith Impact
- Economic development for women in India
- *New Venture in Bible Reading*
- Filipino migrant-worker ministry in Hong Kong
- Women and children living in poverty.

A bulletin insert and additional information about each of these ministries was included in the Spring/Summer issue of Women of the ELCA Newsletter. Pray for these and all ministries of the church regularly and each time you make a Thankoffering because God in Christ Jesus has blessed you. [See also the *Thankoffering Program*, page 46—ED.]

*Bonnie Belasic
Director for Communication
and Stewardship Interpretation*



HYMN *Lutheran Book of Worship* 534, "Now Thank We All Our God."

THE READING [Reader 1 reads 2 Corinthians 9:6-15.]

All: Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all God's benefits. Bless care; Lord, bless us to share.

Reader 2: Let us reflect on the blessings of God in our lives and share God's blessings worldwide through our Thankofferings.

With the help of our Thankofferings, the ELCA helps share God's good news to those who are imprisoned, help make the church a safe place for children, reach out to diverse cultures.

Women of the ELCA Thankofferings also help students link with those in need through campus ministries, support families in Peru, assist health and education efforts in Kenya, and join together with those of other faiths to fight injustice.

Our Thankofferings help support economic development for women in India, a Filipino migrant-worker ministry in Hong Kong, and an ELCA program that encourages Bible reading.

Our Thankofferings also support ministries of Women of the ELCA that address needs and issues of women and children living in poverty.

All: Bless us to care; Lord, bless us to share.

Reader 3: You are able, Lord God, to provide abundantly for all our needs, and, with cups of blessing overflowing, you call us to share in providing for the needs of your people worldwide. We rejoice in your call to share the good news, and we pray now especially for those who are imprisoned.

All: Empower us, Lord, to live boldly in the freedom of the gospel and speak freely and often of your great love. May we be blessed to hear, speak, and live your word of freedom wherever we go, for people, including ourselves, imprisoned by fear, hatred, insecurity, racism, selfishness and ignorance.

Reader 3: We thank you, Lord, for the blessings of children, for their bright eyes and minds, their unquestioning trust, their questions, their laughter and tears.

All: Bless us in making the church and world a safe place for children, a place where love and forgiveness are real, where hope is real, and futures bright because we care, because we share.

ssed to Share

er 3: For the opportunities you give us each day to see, hear, touch, and taste the diversity of cultures, experiences, insights and gifts of your people, we are most grateful.

May we be blessed, God of wholeness, to see past our differences to diversity, beyond sameness to unity.

er 3: With joy and delight we thank you, O Lord, for learning and growth.

We praise you for faithful ministers on our campuses. We thank you for the church's resources that lead us into new ventures of faith and witness. Bless us in our study and service to praise your holy name.

er 3: For the ministry of advocacy, of giving voice to the voiceless, and walking side by side with those who are poor, we ask your guidance, O God of compassion.

Continue to bless, O God, the work of Interfaith Impact and all coalitions and agencies throughout the world that work for justice and advocate for those who are poor and oppressed. We ask your blessing as we acknowledge and extend the power of your presence, and the presence of your power, on behalf of your people, in prayer, witness, and action.

er 3: We lift up before you, God of mercy and might, the needs of women and children throughout the world who face poverty. We thank you for the ministries of the church that help women develop work skills to raise their self-esteem and provide food, clothing, shelter, and education for their families.

Bless us as we link hearts and hands with women throughout the church to embrace the needs and the peoples of the world, and as we put our money, energy and time where our hope is.

GATHERING OF THE THANKOFFERING [LBW 423, "Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service," may be sung.]

er 3: God is truly able to provide us with every blessing in abundance, so that we, always having enough of everything, may provide for every good work.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all God's benefits. Bless us to care; Lord, bless us to share, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

SING HYMN LBW 563, "For the Fruit of All Creation."

Bonnie Belasic, Director for Communication and Stewardship Interpretation, Women of the ELCA

A Great Cloud of Witnesses

Constance L. Beck

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus. . . ."

Hebrews 12:1-2a,
New Revised Standard Version

The cloud of witnesses described here includes those many saints listed in Chapter 11 of Hebrews, and all those believers who have gone before us. Every Sunday morning at worship I am reminded of a present-day cloud of witnesses who physically surround me and encourage me in my faith and life.

I see the parents with small children and I think of the planning and energy it took to get everyone up, dressed, fed, and to church on time.

I see a widowed woman and think her heart must ache over the empty place beside her. Her presence speaks of faith and of comfort from the Holy Spirit.

I see elderly worshipers for whom each movement is a struggle, and I am blessed by their effort to come and worship with me.

I look at the teenagers and appreciate the active role

many take in the service. Their presence and fresh faces renew and encourage me.

I look at those who worship alone, some because a spouse chooses not to attend church with them, and I am glad they came on their own. I look at all the worshipers, wondering what joys they may be experiencing, or what special burdens they might carry. And I pray they will go home feeling lighter . . . even refreshed.

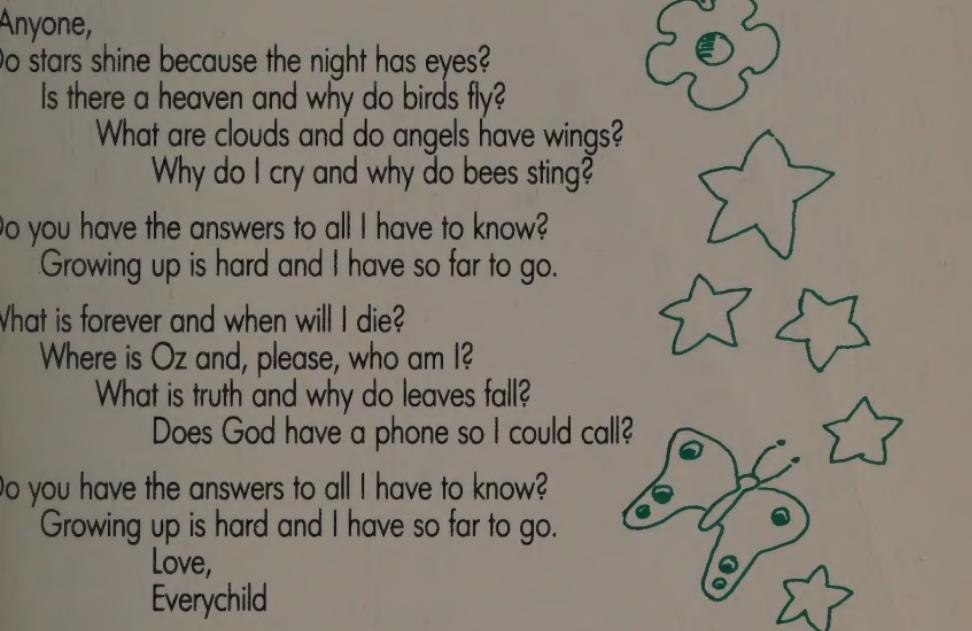
Every Sunday a cloud of witnesses surrounds and ministers to me: in the narthex as I enter, in the pews, on the organ bench, in the choir loft, at the altar, in the pulpit. Each person brings a particular gift. Together we gather to be strengthened by our Lord and to strengthen one another through our common witness.

Together we look to Jesus. Individually we leave to carry out our calling for another week, blessed by the cloud of witnesses by whom we are surrounded. ■

Constance Lovaas Beck, a former missionary, is a member of Lutheran Church of the Resurrection, St. Paul, Minnesota. From 1979 to 1987 she edited Scope, one of the predecessor magazines to LWT.

everychild

Judith A. Wear



Anyone,
Do stars shine because the night has eyes?
Is there a heaven and why do birds fly?
What are clouds and do angels have wings?
Why do I cry and why do bees sting?
Do you have the answers to all I have to know?
Growing up is hard and I have so far to go.

What is forever and when will I die?
Where is Oz and, please, who am I?
What is truth and why do leaves fall?
Does God have a phone so I could call?

Do you have the answers to all I have to know?
Growing up is hard and I have so far to go.
Love,
Everychild

Judith A. Wear is a fourth-grade teacher in Port Angeles, Washington.

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